

Preparing For Future Sophisticated Warfare: Special Operations

AUTHOR Major Jimmy J. Elliott, USAF

CSC 1991

SUBJECT AREA - National Military Strategy

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TITLE: PREPARING FOR FUTURE SOPHISTICATED WARFARE:
SPECIAL OPERATIONS

I. PURPOSE: To edify readers of the U.S. interpretation of future threats that will challenge our nation's policies, security, and economy. Special operations offers an initiative that can act as a force multiplier in countering the future threat.

II. PROBLEM: This nation will be forced to guarantee its security by relying on a military force that is credible, responsive, and effectively decisive, based on a significantly reduced budget.

III. DATA: In these times, when the world is becoming more volatile, the U.S. needs to institute new policies that provide the flexibility to address the full spectrum of threats. We must develop new innovations that contribute to a more secure and robust force projection. The United States faces a crucial the challenge -of surviving the consequences of Congress significantly reducing defense spending. Assuming the cold war is over and the threat of nuclear war no longer exists, Congress has mandated a reduction in the defense budget. It is the "peace dividend" philosophy that presents potential contradictions to the posture of our national security. Congress should attempt to preserve the eminence of our nation through an equal balance of this country's power projections (political, economic, and military).

IV. CONCLUSIONS: Without a complete analysis of the repercussions of cutting the defense budget, Congress are all too willing and eager to wholesale our military potency. Today, our military strength is the only projection of power that gives our country any credibility and prestige.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS: While our country will need to address the full spectrum of future threats to insure security of this nation's economic and political endeavors, it will have to do so with a reduced budget. The nature and doctrine of special operations offers an answer to the current and future needs of our nation, at a reduced overall cost. The stigma of such clandestine and surreptitious organizations must be overcome with an understanding that the contributions of these type operations outweigh the apprehensions of our nations leaders. We must continue to explore how special operations can contribute in every aspect of conflict we face in the future.

Report Documentation Page

*Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188*

Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.

1. REPORT DATE 1991	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED 00-00-1991 to 00-00-1991			
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Preparing For Future Sophisticated Warfare: Special Operations		5a. CONTRACT NUMBER			
		5b. GRANT NUMBER			
		5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER			
6. AUTHOR(S)		5d. PROJECT NUMBER			
		5e. TASK NUMBER			
		5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER			
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Marine Corps War College, Marine Corps University, Marine Corps Combat Development Command, Quantico, VA, 22134-5067		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER			
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)		10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)			
		11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)			
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified	Same as Report (SAR)	19	

Preparing for Future Sophisticated Warfare:
Special Operations

Thesis Statement: Lingered world instability requires U.S. forces to be responsive, flexible, and credible. U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) are uniquely established to contemplate the nature of tomorrow's wars. While future U.S. policy mandates a decrease in defense spending SOF will continue to meet the force projection and security needs of this nation.

- I. The Character of Future War
 - A. The Nature of the Threat
 - B. Paradigms of Conflict
 - C. Financing the Future
- II. Special Operations Capabilities
 - A. Characteristics of Forces
 - B. Special Operations Forces
 - C. Future Conflict and Special Operations Forces
- III. Future Challenges for Special Operations
 - A. Paradigms of Strategy
 - B. Paradigms of Concepts in Special Operations
 - C. The Nature of Warfare and Society

PREPARING FOR FUTURE SOPHISTICATED WARFARE:
SPECIAL OPERATIONS

War of all things proceeds least upon definite rules, but draws principally upon itself for contrivances to meet an emergency; and in such cases the party who faces the struggle and keeps his temper best meets with most security, and he who loses his temper about it with corresponding disaster.

Thucydides

The world is changing under the influence of forces no government can control. The world's population is experiencing a political awakening on a scale without precedent in its history. The global system is undergoing a significant redistribution of political and economic power. And, it may be only a slight miscalculation of those forces that will ignite the global temperament and send us into our next hostile conflict.

Warfare, for all centuries, has been one of the most persistent but most legitimate of abhorrent human activities. The horrors of war have even intensified as we have transitioned into a modern and civilized society. While the United States anxiously awaits for signs of security and stability in the world, the urge for human violence, organized or otherwise, continues to run out of control. Today, as in the future, the American public will demand that our military forces be prepared to counter any form of hostility that compromises our security.

The American political system and its military have always been uneasy with unconventional or "special" organizations. The fact of life, however, is that there is an urgent and critical need for a mechanism that combines military and civilian capabilities whose primary mission is to conduct special activities or operations in the full spectrum of future conflicts.

The Character of Future War

Today, it would be prudent to state and document national security objectives; however, it is quite another thing to define credible threats to those objectives. No strategic analyst can say with a high degree of certainty what those threats will be. It is possible only to make an informed speculation. The first observation which can be made is that potential threats tend to be diffuse, rather than specific. The threats will also depend upon location and circumstances: local or regional conflicts could pose tangible threats to the U.S. military bases, access to important resources, a friendly government, American business investments, or lives of U.S. citizens abroad. Yet, after decades of extensive and intensive debate in the United States, there is no consensus as to

the definition of the threat and how to counter it.

In making a list of national security priorities, we typically begin with the need to deter nuclear war, defend Nato, and prevent the Soviets from ambushing us with technological surprise.¹ Few can doubt that the Pentagon is justified in expending large amounts of resources to avert "worst case scenarios" that could paralyze or terminate Western civilization. Yet, the most terrible danger may be least likely to materialize. Hence, while we constantly strive to ward off Armageddon, we also cannot ignore lesser threats that recur with disturbing frequency--terrorism, subversion, insurgency, guerrilla war, and the like.

Based on superpower rivalry and the threat of appalling devastation from nuclear war, we have so far continued to avert major conflicts. We are beginning to suspect that nations have come to understand the consequences of holocaust and will be more sensitive to actions leading to such destruction. Proliferation of nuclear capabilities has necessitated that vulnerable nations align themselves with East or West.

For many years, American reliance on nuclear weapons or their deterrent effect, was an easy way of assuring swift and complete victory and a semblance of world peace. But today's strategy of deterrence is not the answer to American society's dream of full and final insurance of its security. While they have increased our potential for shock effect, nuclear weapons have also sharpened our anxiety and deepened our sense of insecurity. The end result is that nuclear deterrence strategy should not be applied totally to deter aggressions, in a multiplicity of forms, that persist against the democracies of the West.

Our leadership has assumed too quickly that "the threat has gone away," even though the Soviet Union has been weakened critically. Let there be no question about it, the Soviet threat continues to be a large and sophisticated challenge today, much as it was during the cold war period.

Even though, we have managed the spectrum of threats of the superpowers, through our policy of deterrence, the adversarial world powers have managed to channel conflicts to other global arenas. The Soviet Union still tries to deliver its "message" to other countries, both economically and politically, and has failed terribly. It still tries to impose its philosophies on regional and ethnic problems, with some success, encouraging these third world countries that detest the United States to act against us. The Soviets also have taken advantage of dissension and conflicts to acquire surrogates. So even as the Soviet Union's empire is collapsing, it has opened a "Pandora's Box" of emerging third world countries.

While the question of irrational leaders could be applied to a world power, my insinuation is more toward third world countries. In some cases, these are nations that strive, live, and exist on fanaticism. Many of these nations firmly believe they have a divine right to operate, expand, and die in ways that are appalling. Nonetheless, these nations are essential, because we are, or can be, dependent on them for economic necessities.

A decade ago, the world experienced an average of ten incidents of terrorist violence per week: assassinations, bombings, air hijackings, kidnappings, maimings, or attacks on facilities. The average now is nearly ten a day.² The stark

reality of the death and destruction committed by terrorist groups makes headline news all too often. The ease with which these atrocities are committed instills fear in our citizens and enterprises and frustrates attempts by governments to eliminate this crime. Ironically, the United States policies and strategies, to some extent, have cultivated the strategy of the terrorist.

In the coming years, power and peace will be in marked contrast with the old world political arrangement. Rather than a world dominated by two superpowers, there will be five somewhat evenly matched centers of power: the United States, the Soviet Union, Japan, China, and a confederation of Western European states. At least four of these powers will have the ability to destroy one another. The five great powers will probably have rough parity in economic and technological strengths, but the Soviet Union could become the preeminent military power if it somehow solves its ethnic, economic, and alliance problems, and if the West fails to maintain credible military strength.³ The bipolar world of the late 20th Century will be merely a subject for historical study as we approach a pluralistic world.

There will be a number of obvious issues shaping relationships between the five powers: rivalry for disappearing oil reserves, cooperation or competition in a growing of Third World conflicts, fears raised by continued strength of the Soviet armed force, and the periodic joining of the West in the face of various threats. Consequently, no issue will be as important as the continuing destabilization of the Soviet empire.

The relentless separation of Moscow from its artificial shield, the Western members of the Warsaw Pact, coupled with the

rise of Soviet irredentism and internal ethnic nationalism, could result in a gradual and peaceful diminution of this mighty military power. Or, it still could spill over into a violent global conflagration.

Whatever the case, the incidence of continued world conflict is increasing in every level of the spectrum, and the world's special operations forces will consequently see much service. How these conflicts are fought and how special operations forces are employed will depend on the commitment of our nation.

In order to finance our nation's security, our leadership has gone through great pains trying to classify and define types of threats and wars we will fight in the future. Promulgating the spectrum of threats and conflicts by the level of intensity (high, medium, and low), is the current trend governing all service planning and preparation.

Individual military services, driven by self preservation motives, have scrambled for an even bigger portion of the budget pie so they can challenge each level of conflict and threat on their own. The bottom line is, however, that the entire spectrum of threat and conflict comes in all forms and proportions, and we must be prepared to counter it decisively and successfully. Tragically, as Congress attempts to meet this nation's security objectives by building a credible military infrastructure, it is faced with a significantly reduced budget.

As the gulf crisis winds down, our congressional leadership still insists that deep defense cuts should begin because of the diminished threat of a global war with the Soviet Union. However, eradicating one-fourth of the military by 1995 -- a goal still in

effect as a new budget cycle begins-- makes no sense in light of Operation Desert Shield, the growing strength of regional powers such as Iraq, and the disquieting turmoil in Moscow. Paramount among concerns is fear that forces will be hollowed out, that is cut so precipitously and deeply so as to damage training, leadership, and other factors critical to combat effectiveness. Today, our nation's leadership is having difficulty grappling with a defense budget that will significantly reduce our military arms. Rather than reflecting the current and potential world situation, the budget focuses on the reduced threat of war with the Soviet Union.

Unless we can increase overall defense spending, assuming we want to maintain current readiness and economic production rates, we will have to cancel a number of programs outright at considerable cost. Jobs and money will be lost. Contractors, service bureaucracies, congressional districts, and states will all suffer. The alternative, a large increase in the defense budget, might be better if the nation could afford it. But with the deficit already hovering around \$200 billion annually, it cannot. There should be no doubt in anyone's mind that facing up to harsh reality in defense budgeting will result in a nasty economic shock. A ray of hope, however. After that one-time shock, perhaps we will have a better chance of matching plans and realities.⁴

Our nation's leadership has a number of opportunities to influence the course of future events. Whatever the actions taken, the policies, programs, and budgeting plans of the 1990s will have an impact on the course of the West into the next century. Planning for the future is not risk free, but neither is an attempt

to maintain the status quo. Opportunities may be exploited by taking new initiatives; successful initiatives could be the tools to determine our own fate. Special operations capabilities may be just such an initiative that will provide us the flexibility, at a low cost, and force potency (force multiplier) to meet the entire spectrum of threats or conflicts.

America's society and system have always been skeptical of secrecy, intelligence agencies, and undercover activities. Activities involving small groups of men operating without publicity or proper monitoring by elected officials appear to be undemocratic.

Historically, our heritage of self-sufficiency and insulation from foreign threats made intervention abroad seem unnecessary and dangerous. Even the Army's attitude toward irregular warfare and clandestine operations has been an ambiguous one. Americans are proud that their own ragtag Revolutionary army defeated the highly disciplined, spit-and-polish British by the use of guerrilla warfare.⁵ Since then, however, and for understandable reasons, the U.S. Army has come to resemble the Redcoats far more than the Minutemen of the Revolutionary war era. The exigencies of a superpower's fighting force, together with certain core military values, have produced a large measure of inflexibility and a massive bureaucracy, both of which detract from effectiveness on the field.

A modern military force must be prepared to operate well in extremely large and organized formations. It needs to master the use of tanks, artillery, aircraft, naval vessels, missiles and other heavy, complex weapons. Men and formations must be trained

to obey orders in a reliable, predictable manner.⁶ However, there is also a need for a unit with a different and radical kind of personality and operation. A unit with specialized skills that, in many cases, differs significantly from the proper characteristics of the traditional forces. A small unit of special operations forces (SOF) that can wreak havoc, as a force multiplier, and multiply the intensity of violence that focuses on Centers of Gravity warfare.

Since special operations are so diverse, it is better to describe them by their characteristics rather than by precise definitions. They:

- Are principally offensive, usually of high physical and political risk, and directed at high value, critical and often perishable targets. They offer the potential for high returns, but rarely a second chance should a first mission fail.
- Often are principally politico-military in nature and subject to oversight at national level. Frequently demand operator-level detailed planning and rapid coordination with other commands, services, and government agencies.
- Often require responsive joint ground, air, and maritime operations and the C2 architecture permanently resident in existing SOF structure.
- May frequently be covert, clandestine, or low visibility in nature.
- Are frequently prosecuted when the use of conventional non-SOF is either inappropriate or infeasible, for either military or political reasons.
- Rely on surprise, security, and audacity and frequently employ deception to achieve success.
- Are often conducted at great distances from established bases, requiring sophisticated communications and means of infiltration, exfiltration, and support to penetrate and recover hostile, denied, or politically sensitive areas.

- May require patient long term commitment in a given operational area to achieve national goals through security assistance/ nation building activities or extended unconventional warfare operations. Often training indigenous forces are required to attain these objectives.
- Frequently require discriminate and precise use of force; a mix of high and low technology weapons and equipment; and often require rapid development, acquisition, and employment of weapons and equipment not standard for other DoD forces
- Are primarily conducted by specially trained, often specially recruited and selected personnel, organized into small unit tailored for specific missions or environments. Missions often require detailed knowledge of the culture and language of the country where employed.
- Require detailed intelligence, thorough planning, decentralized execution, and rigorous detailed rehearsal .7

To accomplish these varied functions, U.S. special operations forces are spread across three services. The U.S. Army, Navy, and Air Force have an overall special operations strength of about 40,000 men and women in both active and reserve components.

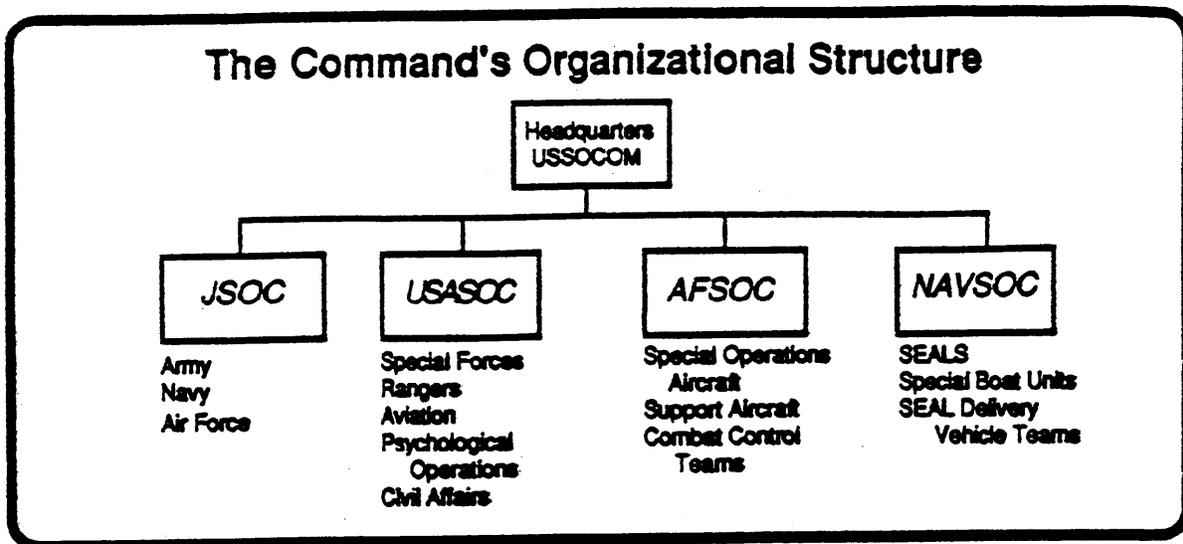


FIGURE 1

The Command's Organizational Structure

Long-range penetration aircraft, both fixed wing and rotary wing, are provided by Air Force special operations elements. There are currently about forty such airframes in active service. The Navy supplies thirty-seven SEAL (Sea Air Land) platoons, each composed of two seven-man squads. In order to infiltrate hostile coastal areas, the SEAL units have mini-sub, 14-man boats capable of 30 knots and having a 200 nautical-mile range, as well as dry dock devices for submerged launch of teams from submarines.

The largest contingent of U.S. special operations forces is assigned to the U.S. Army. A Ranger Regiment of three 550-man battalions specializes in raids, seizures of key facilities, and recovery missions. There is also an active-duty psychological operations group composed of four battalions. The group is capable of broadcast, leaflet, and other uses of media in support of military operations. A number of other psychological operations groups are in a reserve status. In addition, almost all of the Army's civil-affairs capability is in the reserve structure. There is only one small, active-duty civil affairs battalion, a unit that, like its companion reserve units, mainly specializes in orchestrating local resources and manpower to support conventional forces.

A final element in the U.S. special operations mix of forces is Delta Force. This unit is patterned on the model of the British 22nd Special Air Service Regiment. It is the only U.S. force that follows the European special operations pattern--it is a commando-type force.

In addition to assigned operational headquarters and forces,

the Army, Navy, and Air Force have special operations schools and training centers.

The John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School has a twofold mission of developing doctrine and providing training. Based at Ft. Bragg, N.C., since 1952, this organization conducts training courses for Army Special Forces, civil affairs, psychological operations, foreign area officers, and survival, evasion, resistance, and escape. It is also responsible for developing doctrine and new equipment for Army Special Operations Forces.

In November 1985, the Naval Special Warfare Center was established at Naval Amphibious Base, Coronado, Calif. Its mission is to provide instruction and training for personnel of the U.S. Navy and other U.S. armed forces and allied military personnel in Naval special warfare operations and to be the principal authority for Naval special warfare doctrine in support of the maritime strategy.

The U.S. Air Force Special Operations School, located at Hurlburt Field, Florida, has the mission of educating selected U.S. personnel for security assistance assignments to technical assistance field teams, mobile training teams, and other specified overseas activities, and assisting in preparing selected individuals for unconventional warfare and special operations missions.

It is certain that the U.S. special operations structure will undergo substantial change during the 1990s, change stimulated by the U.S. Congress. The U.S. legislative body is acting with the general belief that these units are apt to be neglected by the

American military services and because of dissatisfaction over the performance of special operations mission performance of the 1980s. Thus far, the U.S, Department of Defense and the American armed services have reluctantly implemented congressionally sponsored special operations initiatives, but there is little question that improvements have been made and little doubt that the U.S. Congress will continue to insist on further progress and use of this vital force package.

The nature of conflict, whether that conflict is low, mid, or high intensity, shapes the character of forces that conduct military operations. But conflict also is shaped. It is shaped by politics. Politics, in turn, is influenced by a number of factors, factors that include demography, economics, ideology, and the desire and expectations of people. Although it is not possible to determine with any degree of precision what the politics of the future will be, it is possible to define trends that are working to effect political change. And to that end, special operations will play a significant role.

Since U.S. special operations forces are varied and complex, their technological needs range far. Albeit, technology trends are favoring the terrorist, the special operations unit, and the insurgents of the future. This is particularly true in the realm of state-supported terrorism and the externally assisted insurgent. In some respects, change is the result of the increased effectiveness of new items that a human can carry or wear-- shoulder-fired weapons, rations, communications equipment, devices for assassination and mass terror, and body armor. It is, perhaps, a logical and predictable technological reaction to the age of

mechanized warfare. That era began with man using machines to transport himself and his weapons to battle. It developed into a contest between manned machines and is moving into an age where man dismounts his machines and sends them into battle. In part, man must divorce himself from the machine because it is increasingly vulnerable to his opponent's weapons. But, man's safety is not the only consideration.

Competitive manned war machines are rapidly becoming prohibitively expensive. There are steadily increasing costs of sophisticated manufacturing facilities, training time, complex supply systems, maintenance, and the ever-present necessity to support a continuous technological development process that hopefully counters obsolescence. In the future, the cost of first-line manned war machines has become so great that the list of nations that can afford them is diminishing.

There are, therefore, many reasons and many trends that are pointing to a new era of warfare. The technologically oriented observer readily points to more expensive and more sophisticated weapons, so the new age will be one of robotics and force multiplier warfare. But, others indicate a somewhat less complicated but just as revolutionary new age, an age where men who stand on the ground with weapons in their hands defeat mechanized armies. This view has obvious implications for the future of low intensity conflict and even greater implications for the higher end of the conflict spectrum and the use of special operations forces.

For the future, we must decide what kind of peace we want, what the consequences of that peace will be to our nation, and the price we will be willing to pay for that peace. However, if we

must go to war, it should be quick and decisive so that it will be humane and less costly.

The United States remains a strong world power, but its resources are no longer commensurate with the maintenance of the exalted position it has long held. This country will be required to conduct foreign policy for which there is no precedent, with limited resources, and in an increasingly competitive world in which the threat that held together the various communist alliances will have vanished.

Today we are not trying to rid the world of a diabolical evil or an adversary that occupies one of our national homelands. The United States does not seek a territorial empire or a hegemony. Instead, we look to stimulate the nation's economy and strategic partnerships to balance the Soviets and the economic world powers. We must also maintain close alliance with those nations that contribute to our national welfare.

Our leadership should not use past wars, especially this last conflict, as the blueprint for all future wars. If there is certainty in the profession of arms, it is that the next war will be different. There is an old saying in military circles: "Preparing for the last war ensures losing the next one."⁸ While the military profession is always in a dilemma, attempting to hold on to the old while striving to foretell the new, change does come eventually.

Along with changes, there are some constants. History (experience) tells us that from time immemorial nations have sought security, influence, and wealth. History also tells us that some nations will resort to war to obtain what they seek, while others

may arm to deter war. And some nations may create military alliances with nations with similar interests. History gives no indication of an end to war, end to military forces, or even a successful and inexpensive method or model of avoiding war. Experience also teaches that warfare changes, and that it is best to be the progenitor of change rather than its victim.

The United States is now the world's sole remaining superpower and we must have the military strength to oppose acts of aggression wherever and whenever they occur. We, after all, cannot rely on sharing the responsibility of global peace making and peace keeping, for there is no one else. Furthermore, we must not compromise, in any respect, when it comes to security, freedom, and prestige.

Our track record for predicting the forces needed to counter the threat in the past has been less than perfect. And, we must avoid basking in the euphoria of our recent victory in the Persian Gulf. Because as this war in the gulf made clear, there are more dangers to American security than merely those posed by the Soviet Union. Our past, but most recent, conflicts (Grenada, Panama, and Kuwait) have all been unpredictable. But, the U.S. forces were still relied upon to quickly and decisively resolve those issues.

The euphoria induced by improving relations with the Soviet Union and the accompanying reduced risk of nuclear warfare should not obscure our view of future conflicts. The United States must be able to apply appropriate military force to a variety of scenarios. Special operations forces constitute a low-cost but extraordinarily, robust (force multiplier) and effective force that

promises a decisive initiative in the full spectrum of conflicts

(centers of gravity).

FOOTNOTES

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